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## **GUN RUNNER OUTRUNS, OUTGUNS ELDER, LEADS THROUGHOUT TO WIN 142<sup>ND</sup> RUNNING OF CHURCHILL DOWNS' GRADE I, \$500,000 CLARK HANDICAP**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Friday, Nov. 25, 2016) – Winchell Thoroughbreds LLC and Three Chimneys Farm's 3-year-old **Gun Runner**, third to **Nyquist** in the **Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (GI)** in May, ended his racing year on the highest note as he led from the start under jockey **Florent Geroux** to defeat a powerful group of accomplished older rivals in Friday's 142<sup>nd</sup> running of the Grade I, \$500,000 Clark Handicap Presented by Norton Healthcare, the marquee event on the 12-race "Black Friday" program at Churchill Downs.

Trained by Hall of Fame conditioner **Steve Asmussen**, the son Candy Ride (ARG) turned back a challenge by Canada-based 46-1 longshot **Breaking Lucky** and pulled away in the final yards to win the Clark by 2 ¾ lengths. The victory, the first Grade I triumph for the colt, was his fourth in nine starts on the year, but his first since a triumph in the Matt Winn Stakes (GIII) at Churchill Downs in June and snapped a string of four consecutive losses. Those setbacks included a third-place finish behind eventual Breeders' Cup Classic (GI) winner **Arrogate** in the Travers (GI) at Saratoga and runner-up finishes to **Connect** in the Pennsylvania Derby (GII) and **Tamarkuz** in the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (GI) at Santa Anita, with the latter being his first outing against older rivals.

Gun Runner, the 2-1 favorite and the first 3-year-old to defeat his elders in the Clark since **Willis Horton's Will Take Charge** in 2013, completed the Clark's 1 1/8 miles in over a "fast" track in 1:48.50 and paid \$6.20, \$4.20 and \$3. Breaking Lucky, who had finished eighth in his most recent start in Churchill Downs' Lukas Classic in September, rebounded to finish a clear second under jockey **Luis Contreras** and returned \$25.60 and \$11. **Shaman Ghost** finished third under **Javier Castellano** and paid \$4.20 to show.

The winning time by Gun Runner was the fifth-fastest in the history of the Clark Handicap and the fastest since **Premium Tap** established the stakes record of 1:47.39 in 2006.

The victory by Gun Runner came at the expense a group of nine older rivals who made the 2016 Clark Handicap one of the strongest in recent years for a race that, like Churchill Downs' Kentucky Derby and Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI), has been run annually and without interruption since the historic track's first racing meet in May of 1875. The field included four winners of Grade I races in defending Clark Handicap winner **Effinex**, who finished sixth; **Hoppertunity**, the 2014 Clark winner, runner-up to Effinex in the 2015 Clark and winner of the Jockey Club Gold Cup (GI) at Belmont Park, who finished fourth; **Shaman Ghost**, winner of Saratoga's Woodward (GI) and **Noble Bird**, winner of Churchill Downs' 2015 Stephen Foster Handicap (GI) and this year's \$175,000 Lukas Classic, who started slowly in the Clark and finished seventh.

"I'm so proud of him," Asmussen said. "Walking him over, the horse has such confidence about him. He's kept his strength and his weight with the thousands of miles he's traveled this year on the stages that he's been on.

"He deserved it. With all the Grade I winners he has beaten and for this to be his first Grade I, I feel very confident it will not be his last."

Gun Runner's win in the Clark Handicap was first in the race for Asmussen, who ranks third in career victories at Churchill Downs and was enshrined in Thoroughbred racing's Hall of Fame in August. It also was the first for Geroux and the partners who own the colt. The victory improved Gun Runner's career record to 6-2-2 in 12 races and the winner's prize of \$294,500 pushed his lifetime earnings past the \$2 million mark to \$2,037,800. Asmussen's colt has displayed an affinity for the racing surface at Churchill Downs and his Clark triumph improved his record over the track to 3-0-1 in five races with earnings of \$588,000.

Gun Runner quickly assumed the lead in the Clark after expected pace-setter Noble Bird got away from the starting gate poorly and was ninth in the 10-horse field in the race's early going. Gun Runner settled on the lead under Geroux and led by a length over longshot **Mr. Z** down the backstretch, recording a comfortable first quarter in :23.72 and half-mile in :38. Noble Bird made quick progress after his poor start and moved into second with a half-mile remaining, and Breaking Lucky followed that rival into striking distance in third. Hoppertunity, who raced wide throughout, Shaman Ghost and Effinex were in the middle of the pack on the far turn. Breaking Lucky, four-wide through most of the race, moved toward the leader approaching mid-stretch, but the winner quickly turned back that challenge and steadily increased his margin in the run to the finish line. Breaking Lucky finished a clear second, 3 ½ lengths over the late-running Shaman Ghost, who edged Hoppertunity by three-quarters of a length to hold third.

**Hawaakom**, an 81-1 longshot, rallied from last from finish fifth and was followed past the finish by Effinex, Noble Bird, Are You Kidding Me, Prayer for Relief and Mr. Z.

Two days remain in Churchill Downs 21-day Fall Meet and racing resumes on Saturday with the track's "Stars of Tomorrow II" racing program devoted exclusively to races for 2-year-old Thoroughbreds. The day's main events are the \$200,000 Kentucky Jockey Club (GII), which is a scoring race on the "Road to the Kentucky Derby" points system that will determine the participants in the 2017 Kentucky Derby, and the \$200,000 Golden Rod (GII), a race for 2-year-old fillies that is a scoring race on the "Road to the Kentucky Oaks."

Post time for Saturday's first "Stars of Tomorrow II" race is 1 p.m. EST.

### CLARK HANDICAP QUOTES

**STEVE ASMUSSEN, trainer of GUN RUNNER (winner):** "I'm so proud of him. Walking him over, the horse has such confidence about him. He's kept his strength and his weight with the thousands of miles he's traveled this year on the stages that he's been on. For him to beat this year's Woodward and Jockey Club Gold Cup winners at the end of his 3-year-old year I think speaks wonderful things for him. Obviously, we will get together with Mr. Torrealba and the Three Chimneys group as well as Mr. Winchell and David Fiske and decide how to proceed with him."

**Q: *Decision to go to Clark after the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile ...*** "We were aware of this race and we liked the prospects of this race. After the Breeders' Cup ... it was kind of a tweener race. We were a little bit concerned about the possibility of weather this time of year and the fact he hadn't handled an off track before. But we definitely were aware of this race being here. We saw an exceptional horse beat an exceptional field.

"He deserved it. With all the Grade I winners he has beaten and for this to be his first Grade I, I feel very confident it will not be his last.

"I thought that (jockey) Florent (Geroux) gave him a dream trip today and we had discussed the fact that we thought we had adjusted a little bit too much to who we were running against in the last two races and today to let people adjust to him and let him run his race."

**FLORENT GEROUX, jockey of GUN RUNNER (winner):** "I was pretty confident up front. He was always a good horse when he's forwardly placed and when Noble Bird wasn't there, I just took it from there and just let my horse do his thing and let him be comfortable and turning for home he showed me a super kick."

**LUIS CONTRERAS, jockey of BREAKING LUCKY (second):** "I had a perfect trip. My horse broke right there. Last time I was a little far behind and today I tried to keep him closer. He gave me everything, though. At the quarter pole I swung outside and I thought I might kick on by but the 1-horse (Gun Runner) just kept running. We were just second best today."

**JAVIER CASTELLANO, jockey of SHAMAN GHOST (third):** "I had a good trip. I expected a little more speed in the race and they slowed down the second half to :48; I expected a little more speed from the 6-horse (Noble Bird), who didn't break out of the gate. All of the strategy changed a lot after that. Now I had to chase a little bit and took some momentum away to ask my horse earlier than usual. I think that might have cost me the race a little bit. I don't know if we could beat the winner, who was much the best in the race, but we maybe could have been second. Still, I am very satisfied with the way he did it."

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ, jockey of HOPPERTUNITY (fourth):** "I tried to keep him in the clear. It takes a little while to get him going but he was in a nice rhythm. Down the lane he just weakened a little bit. That's about it."

**JUNIOR ALVARADO, jockey of EFFINEX (sixth):** “He couldn’t keep up with the pace at the beginning so I just tried to see if he could settle wherever he wanted to be. He keeps trying but he couldn’t keep up with them. By the three-eighths pole I tried to put him in the clear to see if he could pick it up from there but I guess it wasn’t his day today. He didn’t give me his best today. I know he’s better than that. He wasn’t feeling it.”

**MARK CASSE, trainer of NOBLE BIRD (seventh):** “We know how this happens. This is the way he is. When he doesn’t break and get his way, he doesn’t fire. And that was today.”

**JULIEN LEPAROUX, jockey of NOBLE BIRD (seventh):** “He’s done this twice now. He just didn’t break. He stayed in the gate, and when that happens, he doesn’t run as good. I’m disappointed about the start. After that I let him run free but just didn’t have any horse after that.”

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